

Name _____ Date _____

The Neolithic Revolution

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Modern humans have existed for 200,000 to 300,000 years. Most of that time was during the Old Stone Age, otherwise known as the Paleolithic Era. The Mesolithic Era, or the Middle Stone Age, began 20,000 to 15,000 years ago. During this time, humans were hunter-gatherers, meaning they hunted whatever animals they could find and foraged for nuts, berries, and other plants. They used simple tools made of wood, stone, and animal bones, and they were able to control fire to use for cooking. Nonetheless, life as a hunter-gatherer was difficult. They were nomads who had to pick up and move whenever the resources of one area were used up.

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Notes

2. b'

About 15,000 years ago, around the end of the last Ice Age, something happened around the world: agriculture, or the domestication of plants and animals for human use. This was the beginning of the Neolithic Age, also called the Agricultural Revolution. Raising and breeding animals led to a consistent supply of milk and meat. Instead of gathering plants, humans now planted seeds and harvested the crops. The development of agriculture meant that humans no longer had to move around from place to place. They had a predictable source of food and could settle in one location.

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Notes

Some of the earliest civilizations emerged in areas near river valleys, where fertile soil and an abundance of water allowed plants to thrive. Agriculture started with crops that grew naturally in each region. The first evidence we have of agriculture is around 9000 BCE in Mesopotamia, the area between and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Fertile Crescent.

Mesopotamians grew wheat, barley, lentils, and chickpeas and herded sheep and goats. Egyptians and Nubians, near the Nile River around 9000 to 7000 BCE, also grew wheat and barley, as well as cattle, fish, and birds. In the Indus River Valley in India, people raised cattle, cotton, lentils, sheep, goats, and chickens. People in ancient China grew rice, soybeans, pigs, and chickens in the areas around the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers.

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Other civilizations appeared in the Western Hemisphere. Around 4000 BCE, the Indigenous people of Mexico grew maize (corn), and later, beans, peppers, squashes, and tomatoes. In Peru around 3000 BCE, people grew potatoes and domesticated llamas.

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The dawn of agriculture led to a surplus of available food and an explosion in the world's population. Between the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution and the rise of ancient Rome, a period of about 10,000 years, the population grew by 25 times from 10 million to 250 million. And from ancient Rome to now, a period of just 2,000 years, it's grown by another 28 times from 250 million to 7 billion! Without agriculture and the domestication of animals, this population boom would not have been possible.

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Like most developments, the Neolithic Revolution has had benefits and downsides. On the positive side, humans have a better chance of living to old age and not dying of starvation. The food surplus eventually made it possible for people to specialize in different areas of labor. People could plan and govern cities, design art and architecture, practice religion, create a writing system, and develop other innovations. On the negative side, the difficulties of farming led to social hierarchies and the atrocity of slavery. Plus, mass agriculture has changed the Earth's environment, leading to climate impacts we feel today. It is essential that we learn from the past while we continue to innovate in the future.

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